

ACCOUNT
OF AN
ALCHEMICAL ROLL ON PARCHMENT,
PRESENTED BY THE EARL OF CROMARTY IN 1707
TO THE
ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS OF EDINBURGH.

BY
WILLIAM MONCRIEFF, M.D., F.R.C.P.

WITH NOTES BY
JOHN SMALL, M.A., F.S.A. Scot.

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ACCOUNT OF AN ALCHEMICAL ROLL ON PARCHMENT, PRESENTED
BY THE EARL OF CROMARTY IN 1707, TO THE ROYAL COLLEGE
OF PHYSICIANS OF EDINBURGH. BY WILLIAM MONCRIEFF, M.D.,
F.R.C.P. ; WITH NOTES BY JOHN SMALL, M.A., F.S.A., SCOT. PLATES
XXV., XXVI.

To the account of the Alchemical MSS. of Sir George Erskine of Innertiel, given at p. 189 of the present volume of the Proceedings of the Society, there is to be added the following description of a Roll on parchment, containing a great many figures symbolical of alchemical processes, which, with five MS. volumes of Sir George Erskine, was presented to the Royal College of Physicians by his grandson the Earl of Cromarty, in the year 1707.

The following note by the Earl, presenting it to the College, is written on the top of the roll, in not very accurate Latin :—

“Edinburgi, decimo nono die Junii anno millesimo septingentesimo et septimo, hoc mysticum symbolum in avita bibliotheca Doⁿⁱ Georgii Areskine, Equitis Aurati, Supremi Senatus et Collegii Justitiæ in Scotia Senator, inter primos justitia et eruditione clarus, philosophiæ hermetici et alumnus et decor, Regumque sui ævi a Conciliis Secretis, almo et spectabili Collegio Medicorum Edinburgensi Regali D.D.”

From the Roll not having been placed in the Library of the College it had fallen aside, and I was first made aware of its existence by Mr Anderson, our Curator, who pointed out to me, after my paper was printed, that it had been exhibited to the Society in March 1827, by Dr William Moncrieff, the then Librarian of the College, who transmitted along with it

to Dr Hibbert, the Secretary of the Society, an account of the figures it contains, which was read but not then printed.

After some search the roll was discovered, and I have made inquiries with the view of ascertaining the nature of this curious document. So far as I can ascertain, it seems to be a copy of symbolical drawings originally made by George Ripley, one of the Canons of Bridlington, in the Diocese of York, a celebrated alchemist who flourished between 1450 and 1490, in which latter year he died.

In Ashmole's "Theatrum Chemicum" there are printed (p. 375), "Verses belonging to an Emblematical Scrowle supposed to be invented by George Ripley." These poems are nearly identical with those inscribed on the Roll; but the latter contains some others, while the language is somewhat more ancient than that found in Ashmole's work. As the scroll is probably unique as we now find it, the following minute and accurate description of it by Dr Moncrieff is subjoined, to which I have added a few notes and references.

A fac-simile of the Roll, for which the Society is indebted to the Royal College of Physicians, has been made by the photo-lithographic process of Messrs Waterston.

Dr Moncrieff's paper is as follows :—

In the centre at the top is seen the face of a man with a long beard, as if looking down : there is a cap on his head, which extends to the left upper corner. About three feet down, his hands may be observed, the thumb and fingers of his right hand as if holding back the scroll, and his left hand extended over it. This figure is supposed to represent Hermes, the founder of alchemy, from whom it has been denominated the Hermetic Art or Philosophy. He was an Egyptian legislator, priest, and philosopher; lived, as some think, in the year of the World 2076, and was so skilled in all profound arts and sciences, that he acquired the surname of Trismegistus, or "thrice great." He is said to be the author of seven books, and a tablet of Alchemy. There is apparently a ribband hanging down from the cap in the form of the figure 8, on which the following words are written :—On one side—"Secreto fonte sepultus, fermentum pariatt lapidem qui multa colorat." On the reverse—"lapis occultus." The scroll seems to be attached to the upper part of the body of the figure by bands passing round, and it hangs down in the form of an

apron. There is a semicircular border at the top with the following words on it, viz. :—" You muste mak Water of the Earthe, and Earthe of the Ayre, and Ayre of the Fyre, and Fyre of the Earth." Within that semicircle is a large figure of a toad¹ with "spūs" written on its body, which is supposed to be the contraction of *spiritus*; above, and on each side of the toad are six pinions, with "spūs" on one side of each, and "āiā," supposed to be the contraction for *anima* on the other side. Below the toad are nine circles—one large one in the centre, with eight smaller ones surrounding it. The smaller circles are all united together, and touch the circumference of the large one. There are seven very small circles in the centre of the large one, and seven radii proceeding from them to seven of the circles surrounding the large one. The remaining one is only attached to the large circle by a band, on which is written "prima materia." On four of the radii is the word "solis"—on one, once; on two, twice; and on one thrice repeated. On the other three radii, the word "luna" thrice on each. There are two figures in the large circle represented as if holding the tablet on which the seven smallest circles are placed; round its circumference are the word "corpus," "spūs," "āiā," "corpus," "spūs," "āiā" "aqua," "spūs." The uppermost circle on the right hand, which is united to the large one by a band, on which is written, "prima materia," has four figures in it, two in the centre, with their arms across the front of their bodies, and one on each side. The right hand one represents a male with a spear, the left hand one a female, with a sort of hatchet, raised as if in the act of striking either the figure next her or an animal like a toad at her feet. There are two animals like lions at the feet of the left hand centre figure; behind the figure with the spear an elephant appears to be represented. Between the two figures in the centre there is a tree, on the left of it the moon, on the right, a bird flying, and at the top of the circle the sun is represented with clouds on the left. Round the circumference of this circle is written, "spūs," *spiritus*, "āiā," *anima*, "corpus." At the bottom,

¹ This toad is described in a poem entitled "The Vision of Schir George Ripley, Chanon of Bridlington," printed in Ashmole's work, p. 374. It is there stated that Ripley saw a toad "full rudde," which when dead he exposed to the action of fire, and out of which he made a medicine—

"Which venome kills, and saveth such as venome chance to take."

below the lions, there is "leo viridis," "leo ruber." In the uppermost circle, on the left hand, there is a furnace in the centre, with a sort of flask on it, in which there appears to be a human figure; below the flask is written, "leniter cum igne amicabile sic ut aliqua violentia nos superare non possit." In the second circle, on the left hand, there are the furnace, flask, and figure in it with the word "white" below the flask. There are three figures on each side as in former ones, some of them having small flasks in their hands, and round the circumference is written, "Vidui sumus et a domo propria elongati sumus secundo nos ipsum reducere ut corpus nos amplectetur et amicabile nobis fiat." In the second circle, on the right hand, there are the furnace, flask, and two figures in it, one with a crown on the head, and a bird as if flying above them, the word "solutio" is written on the furnace below the flask. Round the circumference is written, "The Soule. Forsouth is his sulphur not brenninge;" there are also two figures on each side of the furnace and flask, as in the former circles. In the third circle on the left, there are the furnace and flask, with one figure in the flask, and the word "white" written. Below it there are three figures on the right of the furnace and flask, and two on the left. On the circumference of this circle is written, "Scicio deficio pota me et me albifica."

In the third circle, on the right, there are the furnace and flask, with two figures in the flask, with the word "blacke" written below. A small figure is seen to the right of the stopper of the flask, flying off as if it had escaped from it. With a bird below it, there are three flasks without stoppers on the right side of the furnace, and two figures on the left. Round the circumference of the circle is written "a calido et humido primo ex illis pasce quia debilis sum."

In the fourth circle, on the left hand, there are the furnace and flask, with two figures in it, one apparently an infant, and a bird flying above them. On the furnace is also written "and blacker." Round the circumference of the circle are the words, "Exalta supra subtilia me ut possum reducere ad simplex."

In the fourth circle, on the right, there are also the furnace and flask with one figure in it, and two birds. The word "blacke" is written on the furnace. Two of the monkish figures are seen on the left, and one behind as if in the act of removing the stopper of the flask. On the

right side of the furnace there is a table with two small flasks placed upon it, on the top of one there is a human figure, on the top of the other a bird. Round the circumference of this circle is written "Et leniter digestus amicabile sum secundo exalta ingressu illius."

In the centre, below the circles, and within the red line, is written "The black sea, the black lune, the black soll." On the left side, below the red line, "The black sea—the black lune." On the right side, also below the red line, "The black sea. The black soll." The following is written below:—"Heare ys the laste of the white Stone—And the beginning of the redd Stone." Between the red lines is written in large characters, "Terra stat—Vnda lauāt—Pir purgat—Spiritus intrat."

In the centre, under these words, and above what appears to be flames is written—

"The mounthe of Cholericke beware
Cholericke, Cholericke, beware."

On the left hand are written, viz.:—

"Of the sonne tak the lighte¹
The redd goume that is so brighte,
And of the moone doe allso
The white goume there keepe to,
The philosophers sulphur wiffe,
This i-called withouten stryfe,
Kyberte and Kybryte² i-called allsoe
And other names many moe ;
Of him draw out a tincture,
And mak then a marrage pure
Between the husband and the wife
Spoused with the water of lyfe ;
But of this worke you must beware,
Or els thy worke wil be full bare.
He must be made of his one kinde,
Marke thou well now in thy minde ;
Acetum of philosopers men call this,
And water abidinge, soe yt is

¹ This poem is apparently a version of one called "The work of Richard Carpenter."—*Ashmole*, p. 275.

² Sulphur.

The maydens milke of the dewe,
 That other workes doe renew,
 The spirit of life men called allsoe,
 And other names many moe."

On the right hand are the following lines:—

"The which causeth our regeneration
 Betwene the man and the woman,
 Soe looke, that noe deuision
 Be there in the conjunction
 Of the moone and of the sonne ;
 After the mariage is begone,
 And all while they ben a weddinge
 And him to her drinkinge
 Acetum yt is very fyne
 Better to them than any wine ;
 Nowe when this marrage is done
 Philosophers calls this a stone,
 The which hath greate nature
 To bring a stone that is pure,
 Soe he have kindly norrishinge
 Be perfitt heate and decoction ;
 But in the matrices when they be put
 Looke never thy vessel be mishutte
 Till they have engendered a stone
 In the world there is not such one."

In the centre, below what seems intended for flames is written, "Cholericke." Further, there are ten large leaves proceeding from the top of a tree; on the leaves the words "spūs" "āīā" are written. On the left the sun is represented with his rays; on the forehead "Soll" is written. There are two pinions proceeding from the mouth, with the words "spūs" "āīā" near them. On the right the moon is represented with "luna" written on it; with "spūs" "āīā" twice repeated. Below the large leaves is seen a figure hanging down; the head and arms seem to be human, with long flowing hair on the head; the feet, however, are webbed, with a long serrated tail turning up the tree. On the body is written "spūs." This figure seems to have a hold of a male infant underneath; on the body of the infant is written "āīā," with rays pro-

ceeding from it. Next, there is a sort of gallery supported on a pedestal; there are seven pillars; on the top of each there is a figure; the first on the left is that of a female with a flask hanging down; under this is written "i bibinge." The two figures at the top seem to be priests or monks, having each a flask in their hands, with its mouth downmost, without a stopper; "ij bibing" is written under the one, and "iij bibinge" under the other; the tree is seen between them with vine leaves and grapes. The figure on the right side has a long beard, with a cap on, similar to the large figure at the top of the roll, supposed to represent Hermes; he has a flask in his hand, with its mouth uppermost, and a stopper in it. Under this figure is written, "iiij bibinge." The other three figures, on the top of the pillars, have each flasks in their hands, but without stoppers in them; below those are written "v bibinge, vj bibinge, vij bibinge." There are two naked figures, one on each side of the tree with the vine leaves and grapes, the one on the right a female; the word "corpus" is written on the body of each. Near the head of the left hand figure, the sun is represented with his rays; on the forehead is written, "saia." Behind the head of the right hand figure is seen the moon, with "āā" on it. The words "spūs" "āā" are written in all directions. Between the pillars at the bottom of the gallery is written, on the left side, "The white sea, the white lune;" on the right, "The white soll." On each side of the gallery there are pinions with "spūs" on one side, and "āā" on the other. On the pedestal is written, "terra, fire, stat"—"fire, stat," "fire," "fire," "terra," "terra," "stat." There is a large figure with a beard, represented as if holding the pedestal, his right arms being round it; on his right thigh is written "corpus," on his knee "stat;" on the left is a female figure, with harp surrounding, and "Anima" "oile" written on the body. On the right is another female with wings, with the words "spiritus," "water." Below the pedestal is written, "The red sea," "The red lune, The red soll." Underneath this line a dragon is represented vomiting a toad, before which is written "the taming venom;" on its body "Heare is the fume which is called the month of Cholerick." There are four pillars, two on each side; the two on the right side are fully seen, and the front one on the left, but only the top of the backmost one on the left. On the top of the front pillar on the left there is a flask with a stopper; on the flask is written "fire," and below it on the pillar, "pir

purgat ;" there is a flag proceeding from the stopper of the flask with "lotte" on it. On the top of the front pillar on the right, there is a flask with stopper; in the flask the figure of a bird, and written on it "eaire;" on the pillar there is "spūs entrat"; on the flag proceeding from the stopper "moyste" is written; on the top of the backmost pillar on the right there are the flask with stopper and flag, "watter," on flask, "vnda lavat" under it, and "cold" on flag. On the top of the backmost pillar on the left there are also the flask with stopper and flag, "earth" on flask, "terra stat" under it. The flag is divided; on the upper half there is "earth," on the lower "and drye." Below the dragon the following lines are written on the left side :—

"One the grounde there is an hill,¹
 Allsoe a Serpent within a well;
 His tayle is longe with winges wide,
 All ready to flee by every side,
 Repayre the well faste aboute,
 That the Serpent pass not out;
 For that he be there agone,
 Thou loseste the vertue of the stone,
 What is thy grounde thou must know here,
 And allsoe the well that is soe clere:
 And eke the Dragon with his tayle,
 Or els thy worke will little avayle,
 Thy well muste brenne in water clere;
 Take good heede for this is thy fire,
 Thy fire with water brent shall be,
 And water with fire washe shall he;
 Then earth on fire shall be put,
 And water with ayre shall be knyte."

On the right side the following lines, viz. :—

"Thus you shall goe to putrefaction,
 And bring the serpent to redemption,
 First he shall be blacke as a croe,
 And downe in his denne shall be full lo ;

¹ Ashmole's *Theatrum*, p. 378.

I-sweld as a toade that lyeth on ground,
 Burste with bladders sittinge so rounde,
 They shall to borste and lye full playne,
 And thus with crafte thy Serpent is slayne ;
 He shall change colours there many one,
 And tourne as white as wilbe the bone,
 With the water that he was in,
 Washe him cleane from his sinne ;
 And let him drinke a litle and lyte,
 That shall make him fayre and whyte,
 The which whitenes is ever abiding,
 Lo here is a very full finishinge :
 Of the White stone and the Red
 Heare is truly the very ded."

Next there are the figures of two lions, "The red lyon" on the left, "The green lyon" on the right; flames are represented in the centre, and below is written—"The mounthe of Cholerick beware." Then follows—"Heare is the last of the Red and the beginning to put away the ded the elixer vite." Below this the sun's face and beams are seen, on the left side of which is written, viz. :—

"Take thy father that Phebus so bright¹
 That sits soe hye in magistye,
 With his beames that shineth soe lighte
 In all places where euer he be,
 For hee is father to all thinge,
 Mantayner of life to crope and roote
 And causeth nature forth to springe;
 With the wyfe being soote,
 For he is salve to every sore,
 To bringe about this precious worke ;
 Take good heade into his lore,
 I saye to lawicke and to clarke
 And Omoienie is his name
 Which God shaped with his hand
 And magnesia is his dame ;
 Thou shalte veryly understand,

¹ Ashmole's *Theatrum*, p. 377.

Nowe I shall heare begine
 For to teach the ready waye ;
 Or els little shalt thou winne,
 Take good heede what I say."

On the right side the following lines are written :—

"Devide thou Phebus in many a parte
 With his beames that bene soe brighte
 And thus with nature him coarte,
 The which is mirrour of all lighte ;
 This Phebus hath full many a name,
 Which it is nowe full harde to knowe ;
 And but you take the verye same,
 The philosophers stone you shall not knowe,
 Therefore I counsell ere you beginne,
 Knowe thou well what he be,
 And that is thicke make it thinne,
 For then that shall full well lyke thee,
 Nowe understande well what I meane
 And take good heede thereunto,
 Thy worke els shall little be seene,
 And turn to thee full mickell woe,
 As I have sayde in this our lore,
 Many a name I wiss he hath,
 Some behinde and some before
 As philosophers of yore him gafe."

There is next the figure of an eagle, with a man's beard, crowned, standing on a ball, and from this there are seven large pinions proceeding ; under the feathers of each is written on the top left side, "Aquilas," on the right, "spūs" "āā." Below the ball, on the left side :—

"In the sea withouten lese,¹
 Standes the birde of Hermes,
 Eatinge his winges varyable,
 And maketh himselfe there full stable,
 When all his feathers be then agone
 He standes still there as a stone."

¹ Ashmole's Theatrum, p. 376.

On the right side :—

“ Heare is now both white and redd,
And allsoe the stone to quicken the ded,
All and some withouten fable
Both hard and neshe and malyable ;
Understande now well aright
And thank thou God of this sight.

Under the above lines is written in large characters—“ The Red Sea. The Red Soll. Red Elixer Vite ;” and further down :—

“ The bird of Hermes is my name
Eatinge my winges to make me tame.”

Next there is a large circle, with three smaller ones or balls in it, apparently clasped together; one of these is coloured red or orange, and above it is written—“ The red stone,” and the third black; under it and the red or orange one is written—“ The Elixer Vite.” There are rays proceeding from the circumference of the large circle, which are coloured red or orange, white and black; under these the moon is represented, with “Luna croissant” in large characters above it, the upper semicircle coloured black, the lower red or orange. Below the moon there is what appears to be a serpent or dragon, with a long serrated or twisted tail, but with claws and legs like those of an eagle, standing on a coloured globe like the earth. It seems to have received a wound in the lower part of the body between the legs, from which blood appears to be flowing; it has part of its tail in its jaws or mouth. There are three small circles or balls at the lower part of the globe coloured black, and on each side of it pinions or wings. Under the globe are written in three columns :—

“ I shall now tell withouten lesinge ¹
Howe and what is my generation ;
Omoienie is my father,
And Magnatia is my mother,
And Azote² truly is my sister,
And Kebryte forsouth is my brother,
The Serpent of Arabi is my name,
The which is leader of all this game ;

¹ Ashmole's Theatrum, p. 375.

² Mercury.

That some time was wood and wilde,
And here I am both meeke and milde,
The Sonne and the Moone with their might
Have chasted me that was soe lighte."

Second or centre column—

"My winges that me broughte
Hether and thether where I thought,
And with their might they doe me pull
And bringeth me where they woll,
The bloode of my hearte, I wis,
Causeth nowe both joye and blisse :
And dissolveth the very stone,
And knyteth him or he have done,
Nowe maketh harde that was lixe,
And causeth him to be fixe.
Of my blood and water, I wisse,
Plenty in all the world there is."

Third or right hand column—

"Yt runneth in everye place,
Who soe him find might have grace.
In the world runneth over all
And goeth round as a ball :
But thou understand well this
Of thy work thou shalt misse,
Therefore knowe or thou begin,
What he is and all his kyne,
Manye a name he hath full sure,
And all is but one nature ;
Thou muste parte him in three,
And him kynt as the Trinitye
And make them all there but one
Loe, here is the philosophers stone."

There are two figures at the bottom of the Roll—the one on the right like a priest or bishop, the one on the left has the appearance of a warrior ; they are holding the lower part of the scroll on which lines in English are written, viz. :—

" In the name of the Trinitye
 Harke heare and thou shalte see
 Myne answere that formeth this worke,
 Bothe firste laste brey and darke.
 Some of him I shall you tell
 Both in rime and in spell,
 Malapides, Plat, and Paioye,
 And the booke of Turba Philosophorum,
 Both Aristotell, Jebert, and Hermes,
 Allsoe Lully, Morien,¹ and Rosores,
 Bonelles, Raymundus,² and Alberte,³
 Arnolde⁴ and Percye⁵ the moncke soe black,
 Aros and Vascos, and allsoe Dessema,
 The sister of Moyses, Mary profitessa,
 Bacon⁶ allsoe the greate clarke
 Formeth as I wisse all this warke ;
 All this accordeth nowe in one
 That here is the philosophers stone
 Other wayes yt may not be ;
 Vnderstande well this I counsell thee,
 And pray thou God of his grace,
 That thou mayst have tyme and space
 To have the trowthe of this parable,
 Thanke thou God that is soe stabyll,
 For many a man desires this,
 Both pope, emperour and king I wisse,
 Prieste and clarke and allsoe fryer,
 And not soe much bute the very beger.
 Now Ihs on hich be thy will
 Keepe us from the paynes of hell,

¹ Morien, a Roman Hermit in Judea, A.D. (1000).

² Raymond Lully ; born in 1235 ; seneschal in Majorca 1265 ; died at Majorca on the 29th June 1315, aged 81.

³ Albert ; born 1193 at Lauingen in the Duchy of Neuburg, upon the Danube ; entered the Order of St. Dominic 1222 ; appointed Bishop of Ratisbon, Bavaria, in 1259 ; resigned 1262 ; died at Cologne in 1280, aged 87.

⁴ Arnold of Villanova ; born about 1245 ; died about 1310 ; interred at Genoa.

⁵ Pearce the Black Monk, A.D. 1400.

⁶ Roger Bacon ; born 1214 near Ilchester, in Somerset ; a Franciscan friar, Oxford ; died in 1292, aged 78.

And as thou madest days seaven,
Bring us to the blisse of heaven,
All manner of good men in their degree,
Amen Amen, for charytye."

At the bottom of the scroll is written—

"Si queras in merdis secretis philosophorum
Expensum perdis, opera, tempusque laborum."¹

I have now finished my report of this curious document, which I am well aware is very imperfect ; but I trust that some of the learned members of the Society, who have paid more attention to alchemical lore than I have done, will be able to elucidate the subject more fully. I have been much indebted to my friends Hugh Cowan, Esq., W.S., and Alexander M'Donald, Esq., assistant curator of the Museum of this Society, for their able assistance on the present occasion. I shall conclude in the words of Lord Bacon :—"Alchemy may be compared to the man who told his sons he had left them gold buried somewhere in his vineyard, where they by digging found no gold ; but by turning up the mould about the roots of their vines procured a plentiful vintage. So the search and endeavours to make gold have brought many useful inventions and instructive experiments to light."²

W. MONCRIEFF.

EDINBURGH, 19th December 1826.

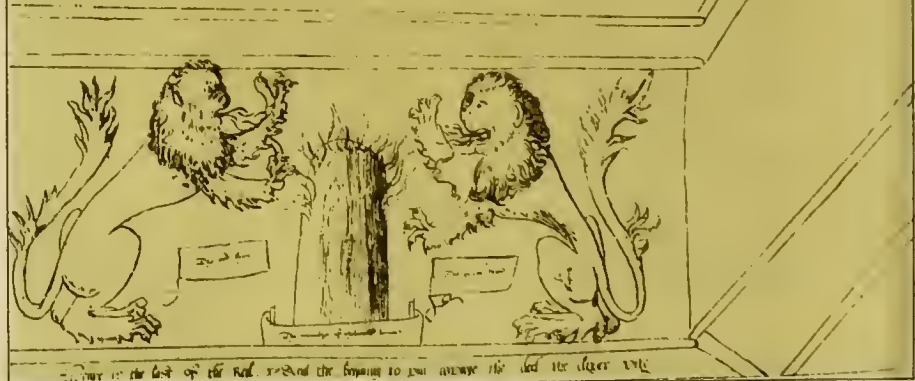
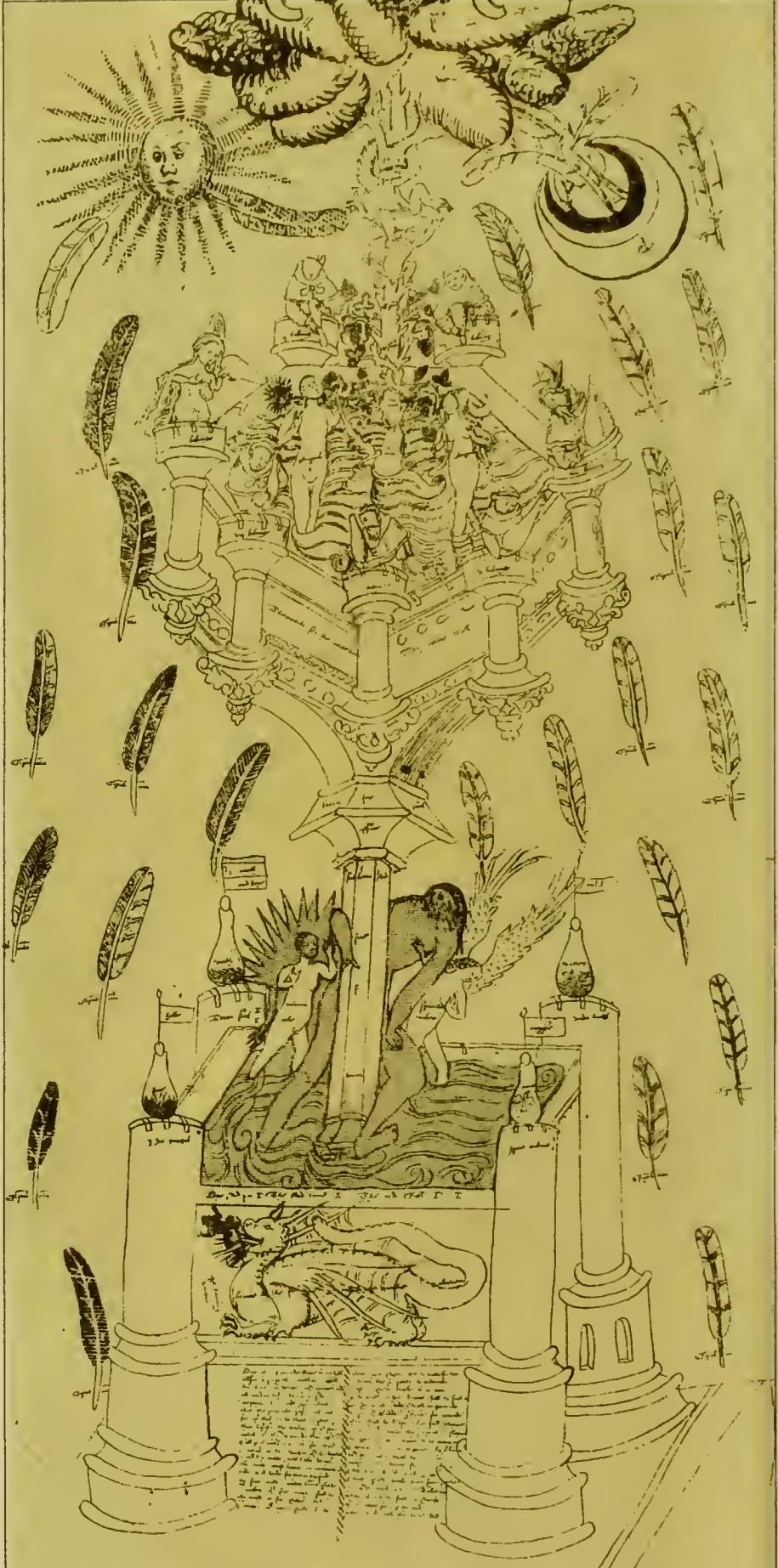
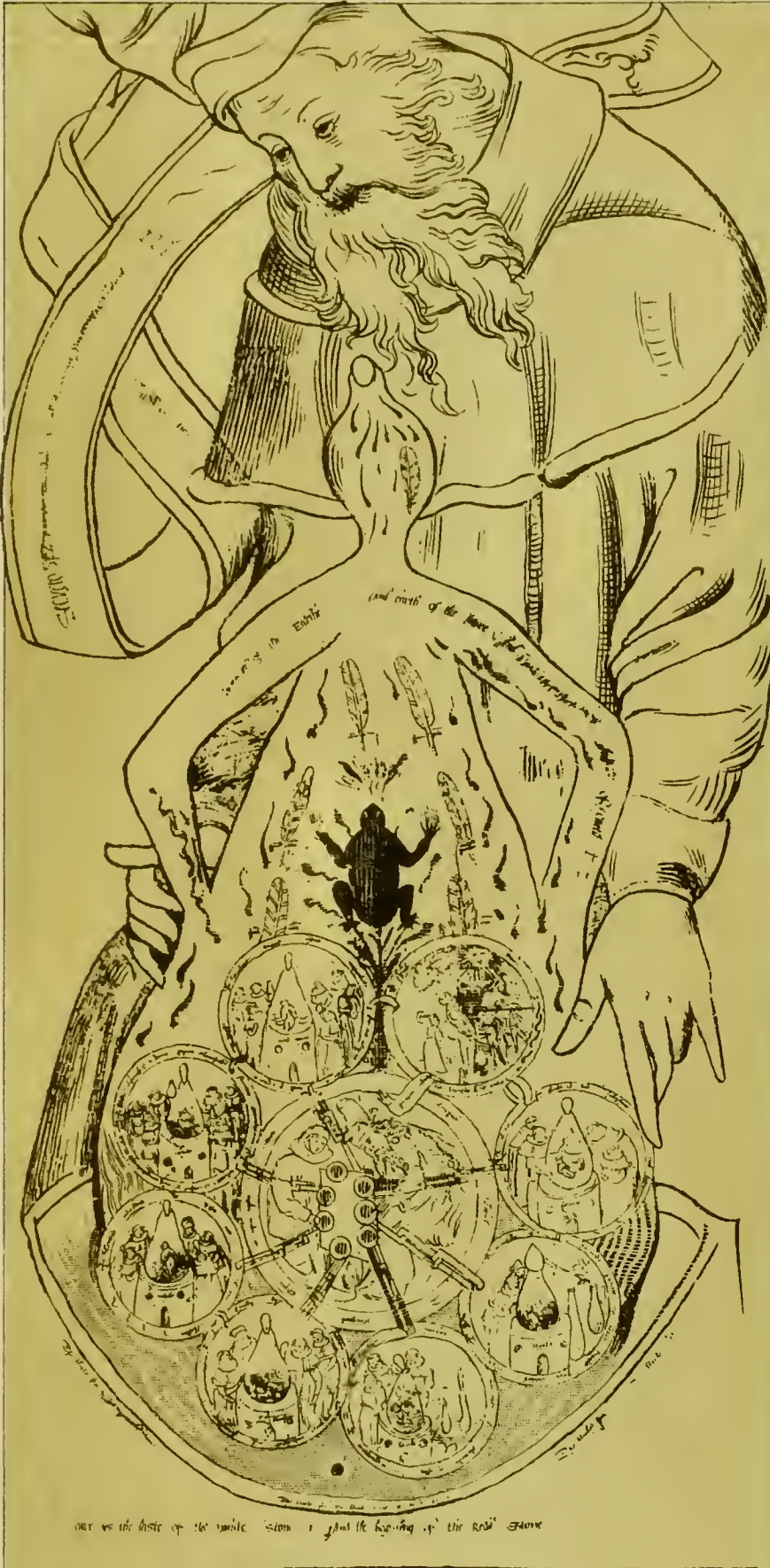
To the above very full account of the Roll by Dr Moncrieff I have little to add. It appears to me, however, that the alchemists by their labours afford an illustration of the deductive or *a priori* method of philosophy which was in use when they flourished, before the genius of Bacon opened up the new and more satisfactory method by induction. They seem to have started with the assumption that there must be a philosopher's stone and an *elixir vitæ*, with all the numerous properties ancient traditions had attributed to them. To find out these they put forth all their energies, and when their experiments failed, they at last seem to have come to the conclusion that they could only be obtained by a direct revelation from God.

This idea perhaps explains the present scroll. The figure at the top

¹ Vide Lives of Alchemistical Philosophers, &c. London, 1815.

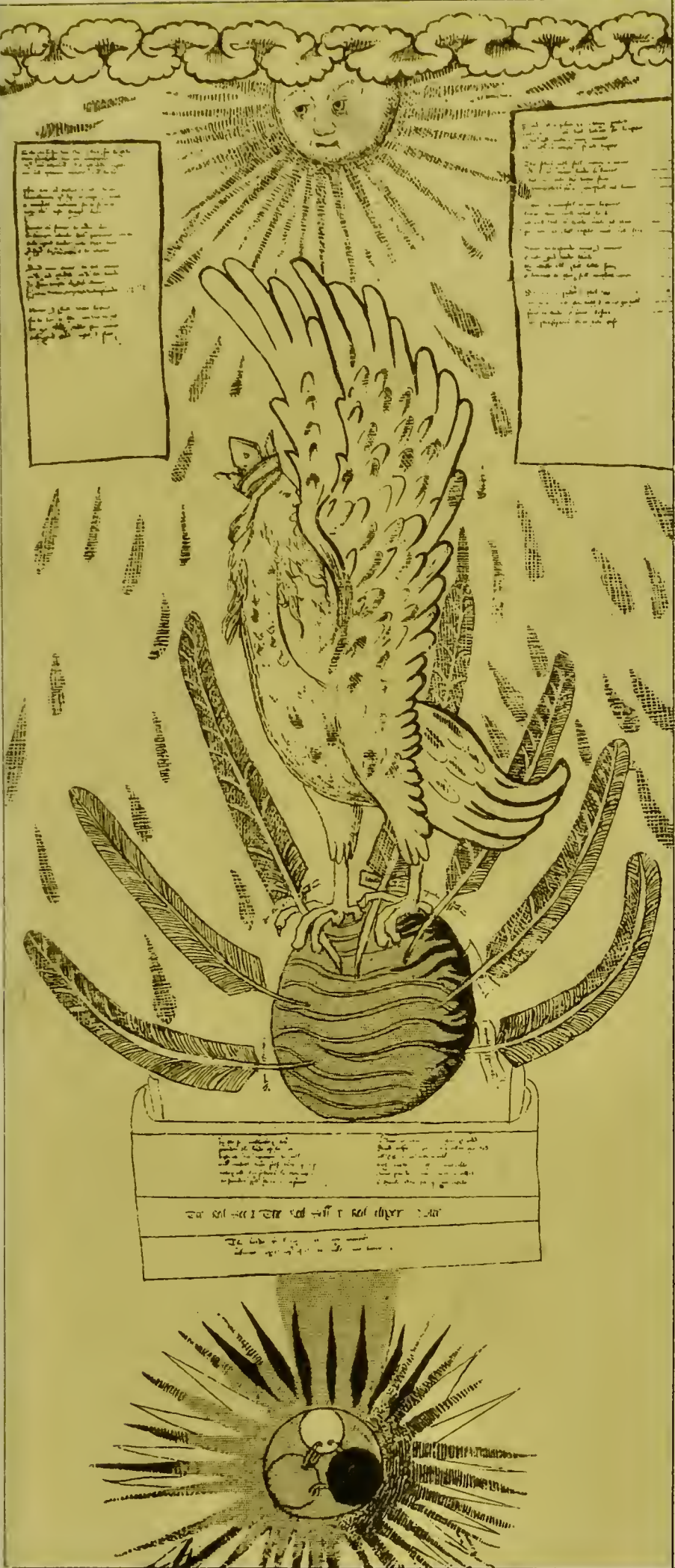
² Lord Bacon's Works. By Peter Shaw, M.D. London, 1733, page 28.

may, I think, represent the Deity. The words corpus, spiritus, anima, so often repeated, are emblematical of the Trinity. The toad seems to represent an antidote to poison of all kinds. The sun and moon are the well-known emblems of gold and silver. The eagle or aquila is described in alchemical works as the queen of birds, and represents sal armoniack, by reason of its "lightness in sublimation." The dragon is mercury, the green lion is vitriol, the red lion is red sulphuret of mercury, while other symbols will no doubt stand for sulphur and other ingredients used in alchemistical processes.

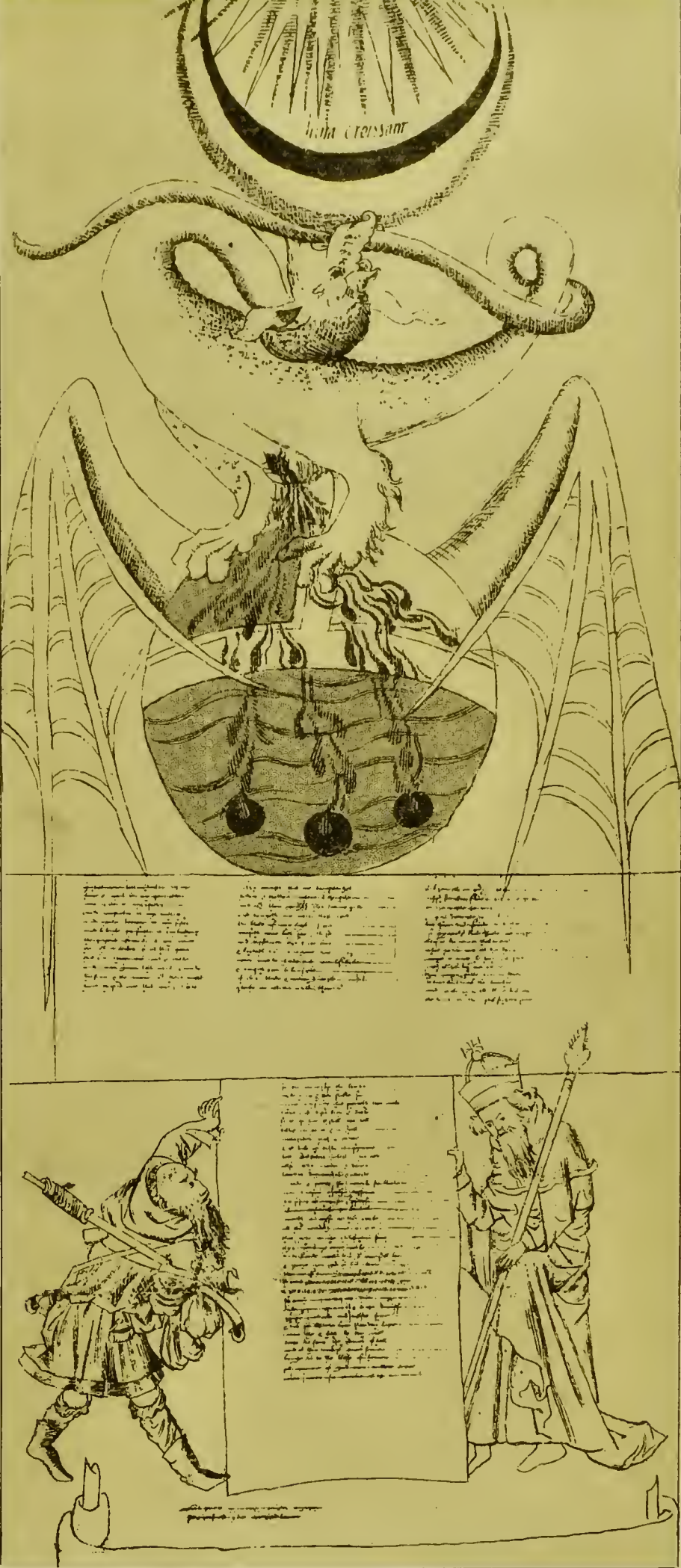


ALCHEMICAL MANUSCRIPT, IN THE LIBRARY OF THE
ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS, EDINBURGH.

A Roll 18 ft. Long



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ALCHEMICAL MANUSCRIPT, IN THE LIBRARY OF THE
ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS, EDINBURGH.
A Roll 18 ft. Long

